

# The War of the Ways





Among the captured prizes was Germany's largest liner, SS *Vaterland*, seized in New York Harbor along with 26 other ships. Renamed USS *Leviathan*, the ship made 19 round trips to Europe as a troop transport.

Once repaired, confiscated ships became part of the American war effort. They were commissioned in the Naval Overseas Transportation Service, an auxiliary branch of the U.S. Navy tasked with command of supply ships. By 1918 the NOTS had carried more than six million tons of war material to Europe, enough to support an expeditionary force of two million men.

After Congress declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917, the United States urgently needed transports to supply its hard-pressed allies and move American troops to Europe. To meet the demand, the federal government interned enemy ships, commandeered American merchantmen under construction, and took charge of the nation's shipbuilding effort.

President Woodrow Wilson immediately authorized the seizure of all enemy vessels being held in U.S. ports. Unfortunately, while Wilson waited for Congress' declaration, many German crews sabotaged their ships. Still, 91 ships and 1,100 prisoners were taken.



This wool officer's service cap was intended for everyday wear, and was much more practical than the ornate, old-fashioned dress hat of its day. A white lightweight version was issued in tropical climates.



The German steamer *Kamilla Rickmers* was confiscated in Boston within 90 minutes of the declaration of war, along with five other vessels. Commissioned USS *Ticonderoga*, the ship served as a supply transport until she was sunk by a U-boat in November 1917, after falling out of a convoy.



“I want everyone in the yards to understand that when we succeed in building these ships, the credit will belong to the men who actually built them. I want all the men in the shipyards to feel that they are working with me, not for me.”

**Charles M. Schwab**

Director General of the Emergency Fleet Corporation, 1918

Directing the U.S. Shipping Board and Emergency Fleet Corporation were two of America's leading industrialists: Edward N. Hurley, and Charles M. Schwab — head of Bethlehem Shipbuilding and Steel Company, the nation's second largest steel maker. Their greatest achievements lay in applying the recent invention of mass-production to the American shipbuilding industry.



Faced with a shortage of automatic pistols, the U.S. Army requested the rush delivery of a modified civilian firearm, resulting in the M1917 Revolver. These sidearms were also carried by Sailors stationed with Navy artillery batteries in France.

Previously ships were custom-built from the keel up, using parts manufactured in the same shipyard. Charles Schwab brought together America's steel and shipbuilding industries — one making parts and other assembling them — and used new technology to simplify shipbuilding so a huge, semi-skilled workforce could build ships faster than ever before.



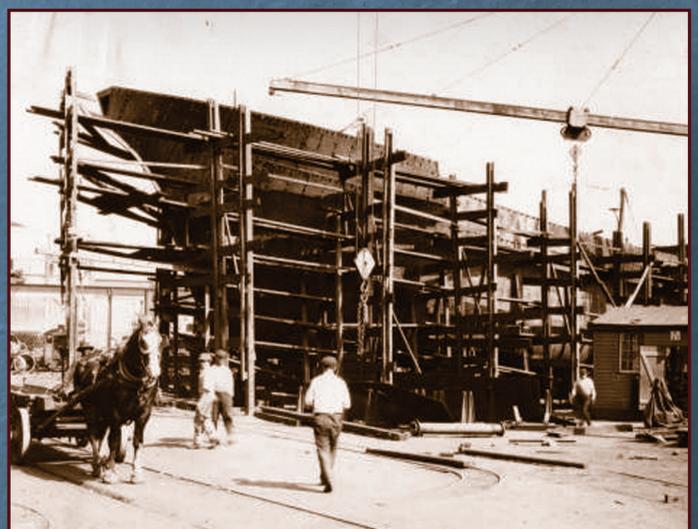
Shoot Ships to Germany and help **AMERICA WIN**—Schwab

At this Shipyard are being built ships to carry to our men “Over There”—Food, Clothing, and the

■ *Shoot Ships to Germany and Help America Win*

Illustrated by Adolph Treidler

United States Shipping Board/Emergency Fleet Corporation, 1918



■ Between 1917 and 1918, the number of American shipyard workers grew from 50,000 to over 350,000, not including over 180,000 others making pre-assembled components at steel mills and plants around the country.

# Hog Island

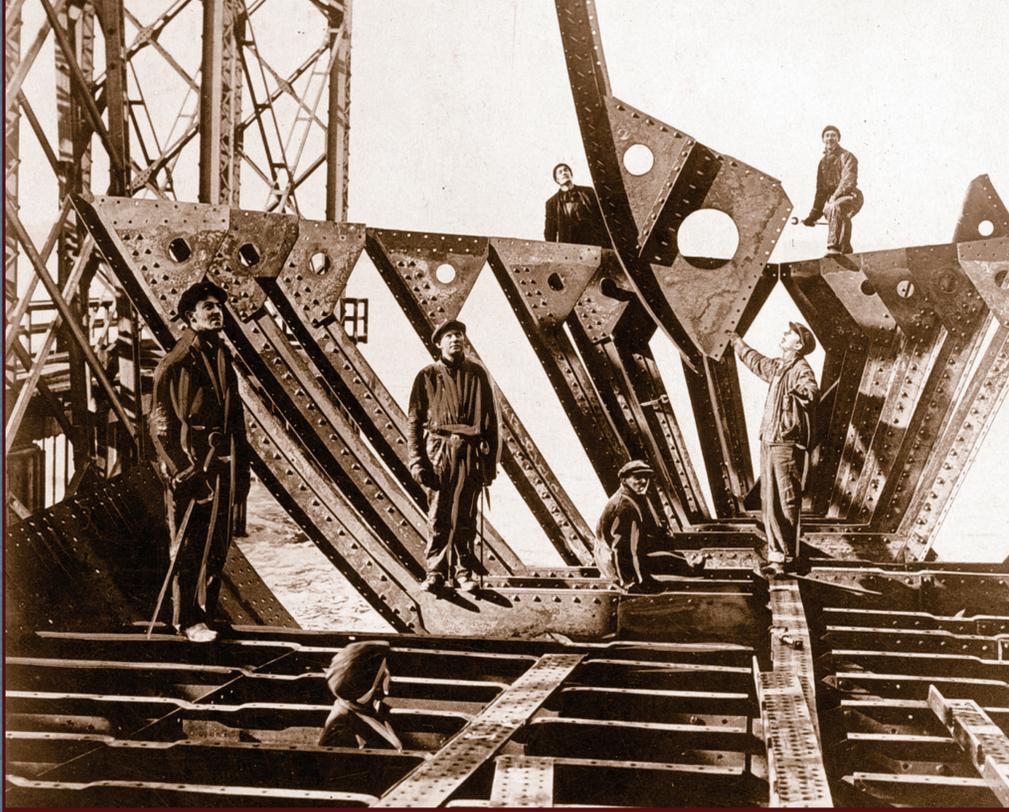
To augment America's private shipyards, the Emergency Fleet Corporation opened four shipyards: at Bristol, Rhode Island; Hog Island, Pennsylvania; Newark, New Jersey; and Wilmington, North Carolina. These yards accounted for 25 percent of American shipbuilding — a ship every four workdays — and exceeded the national shipbuilding product of every other country.



In two years Hog Island completed 122 ships of two standard designs, such as USS *Chaumont*, launched in March 1920. Like many "Hog Islanders," as they were called, USS *Chaumont* saw no service in World War I, but provided critical service during the early days of World War II.



This "War Service Ship Building" badge identified the wearer as a worker at one of the Emergency Fleet Corporation's shipyards.



The use of riveting and prefabricated parts allowed American shipyards to build nearly 3,000 "Liberty Ships" in only 20 months, a rate of construction not possible before the advent of modern shipbuilding technology.

Hog Island, the largest, had over 50 shipways, 250 buildings, 100 miles of railway, and 28 outfitting docks located on 846 acres. At its peak, the shipyard employed more than 34,000 workers. On Memorial Day 1919, Hog Island launched a record-setting five ships in just 48 minutes.

This uniform hat belonged to a Yeoman (F), a female reservist. To help meet personnel requirements, the U.S. Naval Reserve admitted women for the first time in March 1917, through a legal loophole. By the war's end, over 10,000 women had served in a variety of non-combat roles.





An American riveter poses for a photograph at a private shipyard, circa 1918.

Soon after the declaration of war on Germany, the United States had a growing fleet of transports and troopships, which would bring American supplies and troops to Europe where they were badly needed. The Emergency Fleet Corporation's zeal for shipbuilding was soon matched by the U.S. Navy's construction of anti-submarine escorts.



The government shipyards also carried out the nation's first large-scale job training program. Most shipyard workers hired between 1917 and 1918 learned welding, riveting, plumbing, painting or wiring on the job.

Were it not for the U.S. Shipping Board and Emergency Fleet Corporation, the vast work of applying the Camouflage Section's Razzle Dazzle designs to the thousands of hulls built in shipyards across the country would never have been completed in time to contribute to winning the war against the U-boats.

The Navy, seeing that freedom of the seas depended on defeating U-boats rather than enemy battleships, halted expansion of the battle fleet to focus on the construction of destroyers and subchasers. Armed with these, the Navy set out to protect its transports and troopships with a new idea — the convoy system.



By 1917, the Navy possessed effective countermeasures to chemical attacks, primarily the gas mask. But its effectiveness relied on Sailors' ability to use it correctly under pressure. This Navy training manual helped teach this essential survival skill.